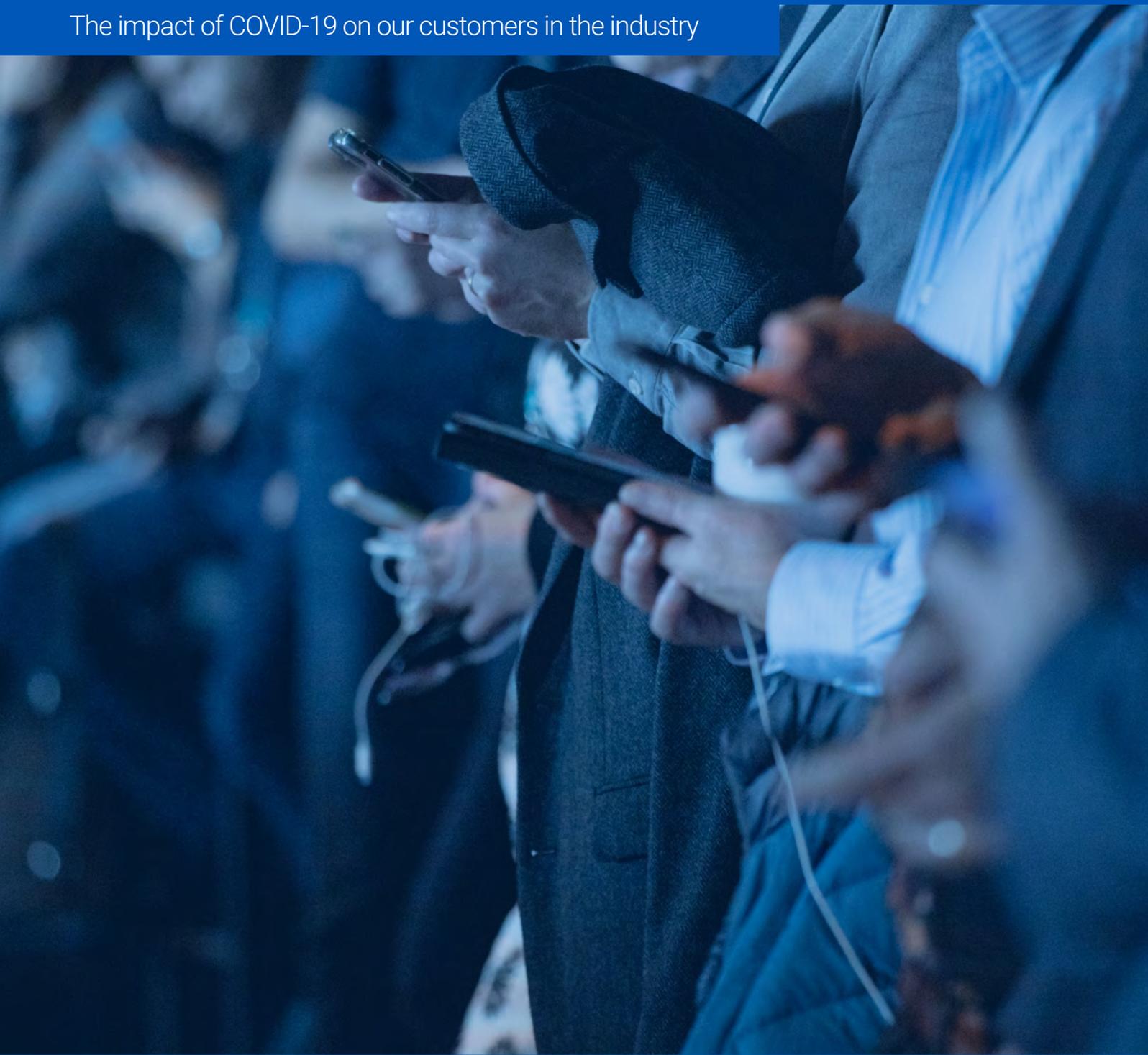# COVID-19 NEWS EXCERPTS: TELECOM & CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

The impact of COVID-19 on our customers in the industry

In the next pandemic, Israelis will be cut off from the internet

The system is holding up now, even though usage has soared, but the network is creaky and badly needs to be upgraded.

Hot Telecom said the biggest increase was recorded Saturday night when traffic was 25% higher than average. Bezeq reported a 30% increase that night over the average and a similar rise on February 21, the weekend that the coronavirus epidemic first stirred broad attention in Israel. The Israeli company Unlimited (IBC) said its Saturday night traffic was 21% above the average.

The telecom industry says it is able to cope now, though in the most extreme scenario usage could grow as much as 75%.

Israel's network has been neglected in recent years for a variety of business and even political reasons; investment in upgrading it has effectively been frozen. The coronavirus pandemic has quickly led to the realization that the neglect can't continue and

more and better capacity is critical.

At the moment we're just managing, but when the next coronavirus arrives the providers won't be able to meet the demand and the infrastructure will collapse Israel is behind the world average in deploying fiber optic infrastructure, which is both faster (up to 1,000 megabits) and more reliable.

At this stage, neither Bezeq nor Hot are rushing to make the needed investment in fiber optic, which would cost them between 3 billion and 5 billion shekels ($820 million and $1.4 billion) for each of them.

Because of regulatory foot-dragging and unclear Communications Ministry policies, neither Bezeq nor Hot have fully embraced fiber optic.

Today, the ministry is aiming for a comprehensive agreement with the industry and has slated hearings ahead of plans to offer financial incentives for Bezeq and Hot to invest in fiber optic. But it's all moving very slowly.

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ITU unveils platform for reinforcing global telecoms infrastructure

The Global Network Resiliency

Platform will provide resources to help governments and the private sector boost network resilience, while helping the telecoms infrastructure cope with surging demand as society's normal routines are upended by efforts to slow the spread of Covid-19.

Never before have telecommunication networks been so vital to our health and safety, and to keep our economy and society working, as during the COVID-19 crisis we are living through today," said ITU secretary-general Houlin Zhao in a statement yesterday (March 23).

Of course, the coronavirus pandemic has not only raised network security concerns: Internet speeds have dipped in many affected countries around the world, according to data from web services firm, Ookla. In response, Apple, Netflix, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram have voluntarily downgraded video-streaming quality to conserve bandwidth.

A surge in the volume of phone calls being made over mobile and landline networks, meanwhile, has in the UK reportedly affected call quality, and caused dropped calls and a major outage.

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Verizon giving customers, small businesses 15GB of extra data during pandemic

The company announced that from March 25 through April 30, all consumer wireless plans available since 2015 will see the extra data added for no additional charge.

5G and broadband bill signed

On Monday, March 23, 2020, the President signed into law:

S. 893, the "Secure 5G and Beyond Act of 2020," which requires the President to develop a strategy to: (1) ensure the security of next generation mobile telecommunications systems and infrastructure in the United States; and (2) assist allies and strategic partners in maximizing the security of next generation mobile telecommunications systems and infrastructure;

S. 1822, the "Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act or the Broadband DATA Act," which requires the Federal Communications Commission to issue rules relating to the collection of data with respect to the availability of broadband services."

Telcos want Amazon, Netflix, YouTube to ease pressure on network infrastructure

Mumbai Phone companies have sought the joint intervention of the telecom department and the home ministry to coax over-the-top (OTT) video streaming services to expedite steps to ease pressure on telco networks amid a surge in video consumption.

The telcos have called on the video streaming service providers to temporarily migrate from HD (hi-definition) to SD (standard definition) streaming, and even dispense with heavy bandwidth consuming advertisements and pop-ups to ease network load.

Road construction projects continue under stay-at-home order

The order provides exemptions for "critical infrastructure workers." On Tuesday, the state issued guidance detailing that, for now, projects to improve roads and bridges fall under the order's exemptions.

We have been told that some projects may be deemed critical and some may not," Binoniemi said.

"But as it stands right now, we're we're moving forward on all projects. "

He cautioned that some local road agencies may decide to postpone construction jobs under their purview.

The Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association represents nearly 600 businesses that work on roads, bridges, sewers, utilities, railroads, excavation and specialty construction jobs, according to its website. The spring season is when road construction projects across the state begin ramping up. Binoniemi called it an "important time" for road builders.

The construction projects must still comply with a portion of Whitmer's order that requires workers to be kept "at least six feet from one another to the maximum extent possible," according to the guidance.

South African telecommunications workers exempt from lockdown

In his address, President Cyril Ramaphosa stated that maintenance workers in the power, water, and telecommunications industry would be allowed to keep working, along with workers in certain essential industries.

Generation, transmission, distribution – all of those (workers) will be exempted from the lockdown," Patel stated.

Telecom department asks states to ensure telecom network maintenance

It will be necessary that instructions reach the field level to permit

personnel maintaining and providing telecom services to continue their work without interruption.

Netflix and other streaming platforms urged to switch to SD during COVID-19 crisis

The European Commission is putting pressure on Netflix and other streaming platforms to switch to standard definition during periods of peak demand as the coronavirus crisis puts unprecedented load on Internet infrastructure.

Earlier this week Vodafone reported a 50% surge in Internet traffic in some European countries as scores of people logged on from home. Streaming platforms, telecom operators and users, we all have a joint responsibility to take steps to ensure the smooth functioning of the Internet during the battle against the virus propagation.

CISA lists critical IT, telecom workers

When it comes to IT and communications employees deemed essential, the list includes:

Workers command centers and data centers, systems administrators, security personnel and IT managers – as well as manufacturers and equipment suppliers – responsible for IT and communications used by law enforcement, public safety, medical, energy and other critical industries.

Those who maintain communications public and private communications infrastructure and regional networks.

Cybersecurity employees responding to attacks on critical infrastructure.

Staff supporting the technology infrastructure for computing services, such as cloud computing business infrastructure and web-based services.

Customer service and help desk staff to aid employees transitioning to remote work and to support payroll, billing, fraud and troubleshooting.

Telecom networks deal with 'unprecedented' pressure as Canadians work from home

Bell sees 60 per cent jump in daytime home internet usage The massive shift is serving as a giant technological experiment, testing bandwidth limits and telephone network capacities as users hold virtual meetings, share files and stream audio and video content.

Corporate telecommunication technology is typically built with a higher capacity, with greater speeds for more concurrent users than consumer-grade products.

Telus said in an email that it has an "unprecedented volume of mass-calling events. In rural areas, CRTC data suggests as few as 40.8 per cent of households have access to high-speed broadband. With many movie theatres, restaurants and bars closed, streaming services are bound to see an increase in viewership, too.

Canadian telecom companies beefing up networks as usage surges from remote working

Bell, Rogers and Telus have acknowledged their networks are experiencing increased traffic, stretching bandwidth limits and

"We are seeing usage increases across our networks. Home internet usage is up the most — up to 60% higher than usual"

telephone network capacities as users work from home, hold virtual meetings, and stream online.

We are seeing usage increases across our networks. Home Internet usage is up the most — up to 60 per cent higher than usual during the day as people work remotely and stream more, up to 20 per cent higher than usual at night.

At Bell Media, local news viewership is up about 40 per cent, national news by 73 per cent.

We'll see continued improvement as we add capacity. We're upgrading network capacity on an ongoing basis to manage increased volumes and to support public health providers.

Some glitches in the UK as Disney+ launches in Europe

Some viewers in Britain complained they were struggling to sign up for Disney+ as the video streaming service launched on Tuesday in Europe, where networks have come under huge strain due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Netflix , YouTube , Amazon Prime

and Facebook are, like Disney+, temporarily throttling bitrates by 25% to help carriers manage data flows without discriminating between different types of traffic.

Telcos prepare for uninterrupted services

Nigerian Communications Commission should facilitate the process of getting approval for the Right of Passage from the federal and state governments for all telecoms operators to allow for easy movement.

In the communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, members agreed that all telcos must be committed to increasing their network capacities to enable them to provide quality service throughout the period of coronavirus outbreak.

## China's IT ministry urges faster 5G rollout: govt document

China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) published a lengthy document on Tuesday calling on localities to accelerate 5G network buildouts and applications to minimise the impact of the coronavirus.

The MIIT said the country has installed 130,000 base stations in 2019. Analysts expect that figure will increase to more than 600,000 this year as investment continues despite the coronavirus disruption.

Global pandemic strains 5G supply chain

Most equipment vendors and manufacturers claim the impact of the coronavirus on the supply chain has been negligible to date.
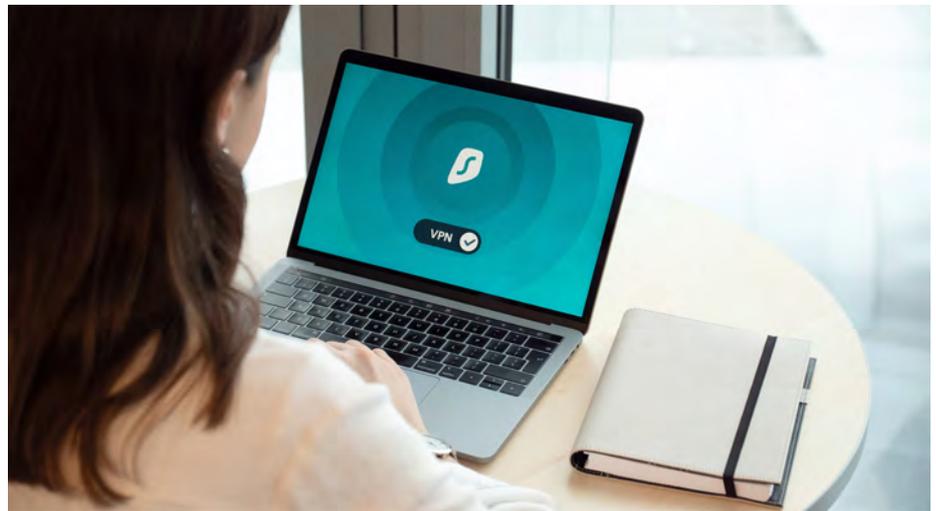
It doesn't take a crystal ball to recognize that the longer this pandemic continues the heavier toll it will have on the chain of suppliers that provide crucial gear for telecommunications networks. It's only a matter of time before vendors that are projecting stability amid unprecedented calamity and uncertainty face bottlenecks in access, production, and distribution.

While the pandemic is undoubtedly causing negative impacts, there is also an unwavering resilience in the need for information, communication, and connectivity, he explained. "We think in some ways it will make getting to the benefit that 5G represents even more important.

The 5G New Radio part of the supply chain has been particularly affected by this, especially because most 5G radio units and active antennas are being manufactured in China.

This will be particularly evident in the U.S. market that is currently planning to create a more open ecosystem that relies on smaller and more agile vendors," Carlaw wrote. "Potential supply chain shortages for 5G equipment will reaffirm the strategy of the U.S. government to create a more open market, which will go beyond the U.S. market in the long term.

As of March 20, Ericsson CEO Börje Ekholm said all of the company's production sites are up and running.

"This means that the short-term impact of the coronavirus on our supply chain has been limited to none," he wrote in a blog post.

But naturally the shutdown of countries runs the risk of impacting our logistics chains.

Many network deployments are at an effective standstill. Even if equipment is available and on hand for installation, many of the professionals responsible for activating that equipment are working from home for the foreseeable future.

Stay-at-home orders in four midwest states broadly exempt construction, Michigan's is more limited

Exceptions for construction work are broadly defined in Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin coronavirus orders, Michigan's is narrower.

China makes massive infrastructure investment to help in COVID-19 recovery

The Asia Times news portal reports that as of the beginning of March: "13 major cities and provinces, including Beijing, Shanghai and Fujian province, released investment plans and "major infrastructure" projects for 2020. Eight cities and provinces

announced their investment budgets, which in total amount to 33.83 trillion yuan (US$4.8 trillion).

Out of 25 regions that are indicating new infrastructure projects, 21 are planning to develop 5G networks, according to the Xinhua news agency.

Telecoms in Croatia report big surge in traffic

Voice traffic in A1 Hrvatska telecom up by 50%. They expect additional increases in network traffic, for which their experts are already preparing, in order to increase capacity in all key points of the Tele2 network.

Data center staff classed as "essential" during pandemic

We've given our staff four docs: the Italian government has made publicly available for download, print and compilation an auto-certification required to be carried by anyone who leaves their home, declaring their name, birth date and place, residence, contact info, and the reason for being out.

Communications workers dubbed essential coronavirus fighters by DHS

Maintenance of communications infrastructure- including privately owned and maintained communication systems- supported by technicians, operators, call-centers, wireline and wireless providers, cable service providers, satellite operations, undersea cable landing stations, Internet Exchange Points, and manufacturers and distributors of communications equipment.

Workers who support radio, television, and media service, including, but not limited to front line news reporters, studio, and technicians for newsgathering and reporting.

Workers at Independent System Operators and Regional Transmission Organizations, and Network Operations staff, engineers and/or technicians to manage the network or operate facilities.

Engineers, technicians and associated personnel responsible for infrastructure construction and restoration, including contractors for construction and engineering of fiber optic cables.

Installation, maintenance and repair technicians that establish, support or repair service as needed.

Central office personnel to maintain and operate central office, data centers, and other network office facilities.

Customer service and support staff, including managed and professional services as well as remote providers of support to transitioning employees to set up and maintain home offices, who interface with customers to manage or support service environments and security issues, including payroll, billing, fraud, and troubleshooting.

Workers who support command centers, including, but not limited to Network Operations Command Center, Broadcast Operations Control Center and Security Operations Command Center.

Data center operators, including system administrators, HVAC & electrical engineers, security personnel, IT managers, data transfer solutions engineers, software and hardware engineers, and database administrators.

Client service centers, field engineers, and other technicians supporting critical infrastructure, as well as manufacturers and supply chain vendors that provide hardware and software, and information technology equipment (to include microelectronics and semiconductors) for critical infrastructure.

Workers responding to cyber incidents involving critical infrastructure, including medical facilities, SLTT governments and federal facilities, energy and utilities, and banks and financial institutions, and other critical infrastructure categories and personnel.

Workers supporting the provision of essential global, national and local infrastructure for computing services (incl. cloud computing services), business infrastructure, web-based services, and critical manufacturing
Workers supporting communications systems and information technology used by law enforcement, public safety, medical, energy and other critical industries.

Support required for continuity of services, including janitorial/cleaning personnel.

The latest on COVID-19 disruption in TV industry

Cable operators and pay TV distributors across the country have stepped up to ensure that all residents have access to broadband, with most offering free high-speed internet service to non-customers with school-age children.

What happens now for the TV industry?

The entire TV business has come to a halt because of the coronavirus pandemic, and nobody has the slightest notion when or how it will start up again.

So far, not much has changed in TV, save for most talk shows going on hiatus and a lot more news programming. That's a good thing, since preserving a sense of normalcy matters in unsettled times. Soon, however, networks will use up their backlog of most original scripted series.

TV viewing up 40% for cable TV news networks, 13% higher for top broadcast networks

Now in the thick of the COVID-19 crisis, TV usage shows sharply higher daytime viewing for general and business news and smaller gains for entertainment for the most recent reporting week.

Total live TV viewing for seven cable news networks for the week ending March 20 shows a 40% increase in total day viewing versus the same week in February of this year. It is 68% higher when looking at the daytime period and 56% higher for the early-fringe (afternoon) daypart, according to Comscore.

Perhaps more impressive is the increase in viewing among two major financial cable news networks – up 78% in total day viewing and 134% more for the daytime daypart, with a 131% gain in early-fringe.

The broadband gap leaves rural Wisconsin behind in the COVID-19 crisis

Virtual schooling, telemedicine and remote work during the pandemic are even more difficultl in communities without high-speed internet

Between 2013 and 2019, the state of Wisconsin provided $20 million in grants to private and public entities and cooperatives to provide high-speed internet in unserved and underserved areas. In 2020, funding greatly expanded to $24 million in broadband expansion grants.

But critics say even the new budgeted amounts are rain drops in an empty pool compared to what is needed to achieve significant coverage across the state. And the state grant rules do not set speed requirements in a rapidly accelerating digital landscape.

In the 2019-20 legislative session, Jeff Smith introduced several bills to improve service, including investing more in broadband expansion grants. But the Republican majority ignored the Democratic state senator's bills and they went nowhere.

TV production shutdowns in the wake of coronavirus, explained

By now, you're all well aware of the avalanche of Hollywood

cancellations and delays caused by the coronavirus outbreak. Blockbuster movies are being wiped from the release schedule while your favorite series are likely suffering as well.

Broadcast network television among NBC, CBS, Fox, ABC and, to a lesser degree, The CW are locked into relatively rigid schedules. These networks typically operate on an annual primetime schedule that covers September to August of the following year with advertising contracts locked and loaded.

As a result, they don't have the same degree of flexibility to combat the dynamic nature of COVID-19 as their cable and streaming counterparts.

Unfortunately, the production halt is resulting in a massive loss of employment across the industry, particularly in below-the-line and freelance roles.

ThousandEyes launches outage map as internet usage explodes during COVID-19 outbreak

Over the past couple of weeks, we've been inundated with requests from businesses, industry analysts and other various parties wanting to get a better understanding of global internet health during these trying times," says Mohit Lad, co-founder and CEO of ThousandEyes.

Today, we're thrilled to release the Global Internet Outages Map to give businesses and consumers alike a reliable source based on actual internet telemetry instead of public rumor to help them understand what's happening on the Internet at any point in time.

Concerns grow that COVID-19 could take down the internet

One of our greatest concerns about the burden that the pandemic is inflicting on Internet infrastructure is that things could come to a crashing halt. Internet brownouts could impact users globally.

Google subsidiary YouTube is managing an estimated 1 billion hours of content viewed every day. Google temporarily reduced all YouTube video streaming in the EU to standard definition by default.

Based on its data, weekday traffic to phones and computers has been increasing rapidly, by 46 percent and 56 percent respectively, as the number of people working from home has increased, Plume observed.

However, total usage of traffic in the home is highly dominated by entertainment-focused devices (including TVs, set top boxes, and gaming consoles). Their usage increased by 13 percent and 6 percent on weekdays and weekends respectively. The date range used to calculate the data was Jan. 29 to March 17.

Plume's data visualization shows the percentage of computers and smartphones in households connected to the Internet between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. (local time), across fourteen U.S. cities, as well as the percentage change each day when compared to baseline levels prior to February. The report shows that by the end of the day on March 20, the number of devices connected to home WiFi networks increased by the following percentages:

• 98.5% in San Francisco & Bay Area
• 98.5% in San Diego
• 86.7% in Denver
• 86.4% in Austin
• 79% in Philadelphia
• 72.2% in New York

The global increase in VPN usage varies between 0 percent and 50 percent in recent weeks, but some of the numbers in specific countries are staggering.

The U.S. and Canada were almost even, with 36 percent and 35 percent growth, respectively.

Most commercial businesses are set up to deal with 10 percent of the workforce working from home and government departments less than 1 percent. The sudden change to near 100 percent of the workforce remote-working puts incredible strain on the limited VPN terminals available, explained Kilsby.

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Will the coronavirus break the internet?

Vodafone, which operates in more than 65 countries, says it has "already seen data traffic increase by 50% in some markets.

And in the US, Comcast opened its network of WiFi hotspots to make them free for customers and non-customers alike. It's also scrapping data caps and taking a relaxed view of late payment of bills.

This isn't the case in all parts of the world. In many developing countries, there isn't the infrastructure to handle a significant increase in demand. Many mobile networks are still running on decades-old 2G, while wired and wireless internet connections are far from ubiquitous – all of which makes the possibility of home-working a remote one.

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Can home and mobile internet handle increased COVID-19 usage

CNN and others in the media have been asking me whether the internet can handle the increased

"Things could come to a crashing halt. Internet brownouts could impact users globally."

load of residential, work-from-home usage due to the coronavirus. That's a good question. While most people will find the internet will work just fine for them to work at home, others will experience problems.

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Netflix, Disney throttle video streams in Europe to handle COVID-19 internet strain

Most of those weaknesses shouldn't be particularly surprising for Techdirt readers. The central transit core of the US internet shouldn't have problems; it's the spotty, expensive, and slow "last mile" where a lot of headaches will pop up. US telcos, who've neglected their infrastructure for years, have refused to upgrade (or in some instances even repair) the nation's aging DSL lines.

As entire families attempt to use sluggish era-2003 speeds to teleconference and stream video, games, and music, problems will inevitably arise (especially on the upstream side). VPNs could also be another congestion point.

But the biggest problem remains affordability and availability. For years, arguments that broadband should be seen as an essential utility were

brushed aside, and now the "digital divide" could easily become a matter of life and death. Some 44 million Americans can't get any kind of broadband whatsoever, and thanks to limited U.S. competition (especially at faster speeds), many more can't afford a decent connection. This patchy, expensive, barely competitive nature of US telecom networks is something the industry's biggest players have lobbied to perpetuate for years, and now the check is likely coming due for many.

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Weekly health check of ISPs, cloud providers and conferencing services

While there has been no corresponding spike in outages in service provider networks, over the past six weeks there has been a steady increase in outages across multiple provider types both worldwide and in the U.S., all according to ThousandEyes, which keeps track of internet and cloud traffic. This includes "a concerning upward trajectory" since the beginning of March of ISP outages worldwide that coincides with the spread of COVID-19.

ISP outages worldwide hovered around 150 per week between Feb. 10 and March 19, but then increased to between just under 200 and about 225 during the following three weeks.

Some providers of collaboration applications, the likes of Zoom, Webex, MSFT Teams, RingCentral also experienced performance problems between March 9 and March 20.

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Go ahead, stream all you want. The internet is fine for now

According to security company Cloudflare, internet traffic in the US

is up between 10 and 20 percent since early February, with peak internet usage up about 13 percent. Nokia's network analytics company Deepfield has seen an even larger jump, with peaks 20 percent to 40 percent higher than usual over the past four weeks in areas highly impacted by Covid-19.

Most of the increased traffic comes from consumer video services, according to Deepfield, with Netflix traffic increasing by 54 to 75 percent in some places. Teleconferencing saw a 300 percent increase in Deepfield's analysis and online gaming saw 400 percent growth.

That's required the company to upgrade its networks. "We build our networks for peak capacity, and that peak going up by one-quarter in a week is pretty amazing," Jasper says. "An upgrade we were going to do six months from now we just had to do last week." The upgrade involved adding or replacing equipment, not doing new construction.

Networks usually see traffic grow around 40 to 50 percent every 12 to 16 months, Deepfield CTO Craig Labovitz says. Now broadband networks are seeing similar growth over the course of weeks. "What will happen a week from now? Has traffic has peaked?" he says. "There's enough capacity, but there won't be if we continue to see this kind of growth."

READ THE ARTICLE HERE

Cable repair technicians don't want to get infected, or infect you, with the coronavirus

"Spectrum, as a company, is not taking care of its employees," said one technician from New York City, who asked to remain anonymous to speak against his employer. "We don't have gloves, we don't have masks, we don't have hand sanitizer."

He and a New Jersey–based technician say Spectrum has only sent generic emails offering health tips and hasn't called emergency meetings or answered staffers' concerns about how to properly protect themselves during the pandemic.

"They just tell us to wash our hands and stay as far away from the customers as possible," the Spectrum technician in New Jersey told BuzzFeed News. "There's nothing else they came up with to keep us safe."

Spectrum had also insisted on call center workers coming into crowded offices despite social distancing guidelines. Spectrum only changed its policies to allow call center staffers to work from home once it was called out publicly.

But the physical nature of the work — which requires technicians to work directly in people's bedrooms,

kitchens, and lounge rooms — puts both them and the customers at risk of exposing one another to the coronavirus.

Do you know how many times I've used a customer's bathroom and I can't wash my hands because they have no soap?" one Spectrum worker told BuzzFeed News.

Internet under strain from overuse amid COVID-19 curfews, EU says

Swiss telecom operator and internet service provider Swisscom pointed out the possible effects of internet overloading due to the crisis caused by the new coronavirus.

According to the statement, on the first day of the curfew, an enormous increase was recorded in the load on the infrastructure. The volume in the fixed network has increased while calls via the mobile network have risen three times higher than on normal days.

PSC to the public: Stay away from utility workers

The Mississippi Public Service Commission is urging the public to stay away from utility crews working in the field.

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